

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 3645

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, MY, TH
SUBJECT: EXTERNAL RESEARCH CONTRACT FOR STUDY OF SEPARATISTS
IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

REF: A) STATE 10371., B) KUALA LUMPUR 3394 (NOTAL),
C) BANGKOK 11793 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: WHILE THIS TOPIC IS OF GENERAL INTEREST AS
HAVING IMPORTANT DIRECT BEARING ON GOM-RTG RELATIONS, WE
BELIEVE THE INHERENT SENSITIVITY OF THE SUBJECT MATTER POSES
RISKS TO US FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS THAT OUTWEIGH THE POSSIBLE
GAINS FROM SUCH A US-SUPPORTED STUDY. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND
AGAINST USG FUNDING OF SUCH A PROJECT. END SUMMARY.

2. WE HAVE CAREFULLY CONSIDERED THE PROPOSED RESEARCH
STUDY ON THE THAI MUSLIM SEPARATIST PROBLEM BY PROF. ASTRI
SUHRKE OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY AS OUTLINED REF A. OUR PART-
ICULAR CONCERN, AS THE DEPT. RIGHTLY NOTED IN PARA 3, IS THAT
SHOULD IT BECOME KNOWN THAT THE USG WAS FUNDING EVEN PART
OF SUCH A STUDY, THIS COULD VERY WELL BE MISINTERPRETED BY
THE GOM. BOTH THE RTG AND THE GOM ARE APPARENTLY EXTRAORD-
INARILY SENSITIVE TO ANY KIND OF OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT IN THIS
ISSUE, AND THEY WOULD PROBABLY WONDER WHY WE WERE STJINTERESTED
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IN SPONSORING SUCH RESEARCH. POTENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT FOR US
WOULD BE COMPOUNDED SHOULD THE STUDY HIGHLIGHT, FOR EXAMPLE,
ANY OFFICIAL OR UNOFFICIAL MALAYSIAN SUPPORT OF SEPARATIST
ELEMENTS.

3. IN RESPONSE TO THE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN PARA 3, WE HAVE
THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS. FIRST, THE PROPOSED PROJECT IS CLEARLY

A SENSITIVE ONE, AS NOTED ABOVE. SECOND, WHILE PROPRIETY CALLS FOR REQUESTING FORMAL APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH, THE GOM DEFINITELY WOULD NOT RPT NOT APPROVE ANY REQUEST TO STUDY THE SEPARATIST ISSUE; A FOREIGN SOCIAL SCIENTIST RECENTLY DESCRIBED THE GREAT DIFFICULTY HE EXPERIENCED OBTAINING A VISA FOR A RURAL DEVELOPMENT STUDY HE IS UNDERTAKING, A MUCH LESS SENSITIVE FIELD. THIRDLY, USG SPONSORSHIP IF IT BECAME KNOWN WILL CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH THE GOM AS NOTED ABOVE. FURTHERMORE, IN THE LATTER EVENT, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT PROF. SUHRKE'S OWN BONAFIDES AS A SOCIAL SCIENTIST MIGHT BECOME SUSPECT BY THE HOST GOVERNMENT OR PERHAPS BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN WHICH SHE IS DOING HER FIELD WORK.

4. FINALLY, REGARDING HER PERSONAL SECURITY, ALTHOUGH WE

CANNOT COMMENT ON THE SITUATION ON THE THAI SIDE OF THE BORDER, THE FACT REMAINS THAT KELANTAN HAS EXPERIENCED SECURITY PROBLEMS RUNNING THE GAMUT FROM SMUGGLING ACROSS THE POROUR BORDER TO KIDNAPPING AND INCURSIONS OF ARMED COMMUNIST INSURGENT ELEMENTS. ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION HAD APPROACHED SERIOUS PROPORTION SINCE 1975, SINCE THEN IT HAS IMPROVED. NONETHELESS WE WOULD NOT RPT NOT CONSIDER IT ADVISABLE FOR HER TO PURSUE FIELD RESEARCH IN REMOTE AREAS, PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO THE BORDER. WE ALSO SUSPECT THAT RECENT EVENTS IN THAT STATE--LAST YEAR'S POLITICAL CRISIS, SEVERAL MONTHS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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DIRECT FEDERAL RULE, AND THE MARCH 11 ELECTIONS WHICH RESULTED IN A CHANGE IN THE STATE GOVERNMENT--MAY MAKE THE GOVERNMENT EVEN MORE SENSITIVE THAN NORMAL TO SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH BY FOREIGNERS THERE.

5. WHILE AS POTENTIAL END-USERS WE WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESULTS OF SUCH RESEARCH, WE CONCLUDE THAT ON BALANCE WE BELIEVE THE INHERENT SENSITIVITY OF THE TOPIC POSES RISKS TO US FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS THAT OUTWEIGH THE POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES OF SUCH A PROPOSED US-SUPPORTED STUDY. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND AGAINST USG FUNDING OF SUCH A PROJECT.
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